

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4446
INFO AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE

C O N F I D E N T I A L 2437

EO 11652 GDS
TAGS: PINT, DR
SUB: BALAGUER DROPS VICE-PRESIDENTIAL RUNNING MATE IN FAVOR
OF INCUMBENT

REF: SANTO DOMINGO 2366,

1. IN YET ANOTHER FLIP-FLOP OF THE ELECTORAL PANORAMA, PRESIDENT BALAGUER TODAY SWITCHED VICE-PRESIDENTIAL RUNNING MATES FOR THE MAY 16 ELECTIONS, DROPPING FERNANDO ALVAREZ BOGAERT IN FAVOR OF INCUMBENT VICE-PRESIDENT CARLOS RAFAEL GOICO MORALES. THE DUMPING OF YOUNG ALVAREZ WAS NOT UNEXPECTED (REF SD 2366). BUT UP UNTIL NOON TODAY, WHEN REFORMIST PARTY (PR) REPRESENTATIVES FORMALLY SUBMITTED TO THE CENTRAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION ALVAREZ' RESIGNATION AS THE PR VICE-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND THE NAME OF GOICO AS HIS REPLACEMENT, POLITICAL CIRCLES HAD SPECULATED FOR DAYS WHETHER BALAGUER HAD DECIDED UPON THE CHANGE.

2. THE ALVAREZ CANDIDACY WAS PROBLEMATIC FROM ITS BEGINNING AT MARCH 14 PR CONVENTION, WHEN DELEGATES WERE SURPRISED BY HIS NOMINATION. ALVAREZ HAD THREE PRINCIPAL THING WORKING AGAINST HIM; HIS REPUTATION FOR HAVING BILKED THE STATE SUGAR COUNCIL OF AT LEAST SIX MILLION PESOS WHEN HE WAS ITS DIRECTOR, A HISTORY OF MENTAL INSTABILITY, AND HIS IDENTIFICATION WITH THE MILITARY
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FACTION LED BY MGEN ENRIQUE PEREZ Y PEREZ, WHICH CAUSED GREAT DISGRUNTLEMENT WITHIN THE FACTION HEADED BY NATIONAL POLICE CHIEF MGEN NEIT NIVAR.

3. BALAGUER, SEEMINGLY AWARE THAT THE ALVAREZ CANDIDACY MIGHT NOT BE VIABLE, NEVER FULLY EMBRACED HIM AS A RUNNING MATE AND AT NO TIME IN HIS OWN INTENSE CAMPAIGN DID THE PRESIDENT EVER REFER TO

HIM BY NAME. ALVAREZ WAS OFTEN SEEN TOGETHER ON THE PODIUM WITH BALAGUER AT CAMPAIGN EVENTS, BUT HE WAS NEVER ALLOWED TO SPEAK ON THESE OCCASIONS OR TO RUN A SIGNIFICANT CAMPAIGN OF HIS OWN. AS TIME PASSED HE CAME TO BE WIDELY VIEWED AS MORE OF A LIABILITY TO BALAGUER'S RE-ELECTION HOPES THAN AN ASSET. GIVEN WHAT MOST OBSERVERS VIEW AS AN EXTREMELY CLOSE RACE BETWEEN BALAGUER AND THE OPPOSITION PRD, THE PRESIDENT COULD NOT AFFORD SUCH A LIABILITY AT THIS TIME.

4. THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT TENSIONS AMONG MILITARY FACTIONS CAUSED BY ALVAREZ' DESIGNATION WERE A VERY IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION. BOTH THE PRESIDENT AND ALVAREZ HIMSELF WERE UNDER STRONG PRESSURE FROM NIVAR AND OTHER MEMBERS OF HIS GROUP, INCLUDING ARMED FORCES SECRETARY LGEN JUAN RENE BEAUCHAMP JAVIER, TO DESIST FROM ALVAREZ' CANDIDACY. A MINOR CRISIS OCCURRED ON APRIL 18 WHEN ALVAREZ WAS TAKEN BY HELICOPTER FROM SANTIAGO TO BEAUCHAMP'S OFFICE IN SANTO DOMINGO AND REPORTEDLY PRESSURED FOR EIGHT HOURS, BUT REFUSED TO RESIGN. THOUGH NEWSPAPERS DID NOT REPORT THE INCIDENT IMMEDIATELY, DETAILS OF THE ENCOUNTER WERE SOON COMMON GOSSIP IN THE POLITICAL RUMOR MILLS AND THE STORY FINALLY APPEARED IN TWO AFTERNOON TABLOIDS EARLIER THIS WEEK.

5. ALTHOUGH HE RESISTED THE APRIL 18 ENCOUNTER, ALVAREZ REPORTEDLY LATER GAVE THE PRESIDENT AN UNSIGNED LETTER OF RESIGNATION FOR USE AS BALAGUER SAW FIT. WITH THE ELECTION DRAWING NEAR, CONFIDENTIAL

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AND MANY SIGNS POINTING TO A PRD SURGE, BALAGUER APPARENTLY DECIDED HE COULD WAIT NO LONGER TO MAKE A CHANGE OF RUNNING MATES.

COMMENT: BY DROPPING THE 37-YEAR-OLD ALVAREZ FOR THE 68-YEAR-OLD GOICO, BALAGUER HAS DILUTED A PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVE HE HAD LAID OUT FOR HIS NEXT TERM IN OFFICE SHOULD HE BE RE-ELECTED: TO BRING YOUTH INTO HIS ADMINISTRATION AND TO RESTRUCTURE AND MODERNIZE THE GOVERNMENT. THE CHOICE OF THE RELIABLE AND RESPECTED GOICO MAY SET SOME AT EASE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE IN CAPABLE HANDS SHOULD THE 70-YEAR-OLD BALAGUER DISAPPEAR OR BECOME INCAPACITATED. BUT THE MOVE REOPENS NUMEROUS QUESTIONS OVER THE FUTURE LEADERSHIP OF HIS PARTY. GOICO IS AN ACCEPTABLE VICE-PRESIDENT BUT NOT SEEN BY ANY MEANS AS BALAGUER'S LONG-RANGE SUCCESSOR. BALAGUER IS STILL BELIEVED BY SOME OBSERVERS TO HAVE PLANNED THE SCENARIO WHICH HAS NOW BEEN PLAYED OUT AND THIS INTERPRETATION CANNOT BE DISMISSED IN ITS ENTIRETY. HOWEVER, THERE APPEARS TO BE LITTLE QUESTION THAT PRESSURE FROM THE ARMED FORCES WAS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN DUMPING ALVAREZ AT THIS TIME, AND THAT BALAGUER, WHO HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO MANAGE AND DOMINATE THE MILITARY, HAS HAD TO ACCOMMODATE TO THEIR INTERESTS IN THIS CASE.

MANY DOMINICANS VIEW THE MILITARY HIERARCHY AS PART OF THE BALAGUER
GOVERNMENT
AND THEREFORE JUDGED THE MILITARY MANEUVERING AGAINST
ALVAREZ AS SIMPLY AN IN-HOUSE REFORMISTA PROBLEM. THE DEVELOPMENTS
IN THIS AFFAIR REFLECT THE CONTINUING IMPORTANCE OF THE MILITARY
IN DOMINICAN LIFE.
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